

Government Orders

Clearly, if we do not terminate the strike action taken by these two groups, the health and safety of Canadians will be threatened.

That is why the government has acted without delay to order these employees back to work.

[English]

Let me say as I stated yesterday in this House, even with the legislation introduced, I would be willing to negotiate. I will repeat that commitment. I am available and I will be willing to negotiate any time so that we can reach a mutually agreeable negotiated settlement.

Members of the House are aware of the inherent dangers and the increased risk to the safety and security of Canadians caused by these two strikes. Where the services provided by the employees are in the interest of safety and security of the public, it is particularly important that the parties negotiate seriously and responsibly to reach a settlement. Now this may require considerable skill. It certainly requires a willingness to compromise and, perhaps, most of all, perseverance. We owe nothing less to the Canadians we serve. It is the public who suffers the consequences of the denial of government services and many of those services are essential to health, safety and security. The government is not prepared to wait any longer.

Canadians must be able to count on the Coast Guard to rescue them. Canadians must be able to navigate safely in Canadian waters. Canadian veterans must be able to count on being given proper care.

I want to deal for a moment with some clear examples that show why we must act now. Let me point out to all hon. members the importance of safe navigation in the St. Lawrence Seaway. Traffic passing through the system include ships carrying grain, coal, iron ore and many other essential products. Many Canadian jobs are dependent on the reliable and safe operations of the Seaway. People who work in our refineries, in the aluminum industry, the Port of Montreal, all depend on the safe and secure passage of ships in the St. Lawrence.

The western Canadian grain farmers rely heavily on our normally dependable shipping system.

The early closure of the Seaway caused by this labour dispute affects Canadian jobs throughout Canada. We are very concerned also about the health and safety issues in the case of health service workers.

[Translation]

There are currently 726 veterans requiring care at Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue Hospital, one-third of whom are bedridden. Rideau Hospital has 131 veterans. In Saskatoon, 31 veterans are now in hospital, while another 29 have had to be sent home or transferred to other hospitals.

[English]

We cannot jeopardize the health of veterans, many of whom are disabled or chronic care patients. These people have served their country with honour and pride, in difficult times, and we must ensure their care is not put in jeopardy by this work stoppage.

With little prospect of a settlement through the normal collective bargaining process, it is becoming increasingly difficult for management to make sure that all essential services are being carried out. The government must therefore become the defender of the public interest. The bill before this House provides for an immediate return to work by all ships' crews and hospital services employees and for binding conciliations on the issues.

[Translation]

We can be proud of our record in the federal Public Service, when 95 per cent of the agreements have been settled without employees having to resort to strike action.

[English]

I wish to take a moment to outline the specific provisions of the legislation. As I indicated, the bill provides for an immediate return by ships' crews and hospital services employees. It also requires that the Public Service Alliance of Canada call a halt to the two strikes and inform striking employees that they are to resume their duties. If the law is ignored, employees who continue to strike will face fines of between \$500 and \$1000 a day. Union representatives who fail to comply could be fined between \$10,000 and \$50,000 a day and the union itself could be fined between \$50,000 and \$100,000 a day.